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Abdürrezzak Bedirhan

Ottoman Kurd and Russophile in the Twilight of Empire

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In a January 1914 article in the London journal *The National Review*, Walter Guinness described the situation in Ottoman eastern Anatolia.[1] Events in that distant region were topical, even for a British audience. The Ottoman Empire had long served as a barrier to Russia's southern expansion, but now it was reeling from the catastrophic defeats of the Balkan wars and its breakdown and final partition appeared imminent. Ottoman eastern Anatolia, just across Russia's Caucasian border, was heating up as a site of great-power competition. Russia had been locking horns with Germany for more than a year over a scheme for the future reform of the region's administration, ostensibly for providing greater security to the region's Armenians against the more numerous Kurds. In "Impressions of Armenia and Kurdistan" Guinness called attention to the incapacity of the Ottoman administration to maintain order, the precarious position of the region's Armenians, and the "shadow of Russian military power … thrown across the Caucasian frontier." The region's Armenian minority, Guinness noted, traditionally had regarded the prospect of Russian rule with ambivalence. But because of the region's chronic and sometimes violent disorder, Russia's recent tack away from repression of its own Armenians in domestic policy, and skillful Russian propaganda, it now seemed that eastern Anatolia's Armenians looked

There are multiple ways to transliterate the name "Abdürrezzak" and other names of Arabic origin. For the sake of simplicity and consistency, I am using this variant, which is a standard transliteration of the name from Ottoman Turkish, which was written with a modified Arabic script, into modern Turkish, which is written with a Latin alphabet.

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[1] Ottoman eastern Anatolia here refers to the so-called *Vilayât-ı Sitte*, or "Six Provinces," of Van, Bitlis, Diyar-ı Bekir, Marmaret ül-Aziz, Sivas, and Erzurum.

with favor at the prospect of Russian rule. What Guinness could not fathom, however, was "the liking which Kurds show for Russia." Unlike the beleaguered Armenians, the Kurds dominated local politics, were "very free of any form of Turkish interference," and had no obvious reason to wish to break from Istanbul. Yet, Guinness discovered, many Kurds indeed not only welcomed the prospect of Russian rule but were even carrying rifles supplied by Russia.[2]

For a European correspondent in 1914 the notion that imperial Russia could hold appeal for Muslim tribesmen was difficult to comprehend. After all, as Guinness laid out, even the Ottoman Armenians' affinity for Russia was conditional, more the product of alienation from Ottoman administration than attraction toward Russia. That Russia could command fear and demand respect was understandable, but what of positive value could Russia offer? Historians of the Near East have by and large missed this question for three sets of reasons: their starting assumptions about imperial Russian policy in the region, limited access to sources, and a polarization of the historiography. Typically, historians of the Near East have reduced Russia's impact on the region to the projection of unidimensional military and diplomatic power, overlooking such things as the impact of Baku's oil industry on migration patterns in Iran and the wider influence of socialist movements in the Caucasus.[3] Moreover, when they do discuss Russia's influence in the region at the beginning of the 20th century, they operate within a narrative framework constrained by nationalist teleology and restrict their focus to Russian sponsorship of Christians in general and Armenians in particular, all but ignoring Russia's relationship with the Kurds.

In addition to these conceptual assumptions about the nature of Russia's interaction with the Middle East, linguistic barriers endemic to "transregional" research spanning Russia and its non-European borderlands, coupled with earlier obstacles to obtaining access to Russian and Ottoman archives alike, also help explain why scholars have left Russia's relationship with the Kurds in obscurity. Nonetheless, formerly restricted access to sources can provide only part of the explanation. Contemporary observers from Europe and America, including diplomats, missionaries, and journalists such as Guinness, were aware of Russia's dealings with the Kurds and informed both their governments and their publics about them.

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[2] Walter Guinness, "Impressions of Armenia and Kurdistan," *National Review* 62 (January 1914): 789–801.

[3] For exceptions, see Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Russo-Caucasian Origins of the Iranian Left: Social Democracy in Modern Iran* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2001); and Touraj Atabaki, "Disgruntled Guests: Iranian Subalterns on the Margins of the Tsarist Empire," in *The State and the Subaltern: Modernization and the State in Turkey and Iran*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 31–52.

Perhaps the largest part of the explanation stems from the polarization of what might be termed "Anatolian historiography" but, in reflection of the underlying problem, is instead known as separate Turkish, Armenian, and Kurdish historiographies. Two linked questions have preoccupied this tripartite historiography: the destruction of Anatolia's Christian communities, especially the Armenian, and the creation of the Turkish Republic. Until quite recently, the three branches have differed radically in their evaluation of these processes and have preferred simplified and incommensurable narratives to explain them. Armenian historiography presents the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians as a willful act of genocide, the consequence of ethno-nationalist ambitions to construct a greater Turkic state stretching from Anatolia into the Caucasus and beyond. Although rivalry with Kurds was at the center of Ottoman Armenian concerns up through World War I, Armenian historiography generally glosses over this in favor of narratives that present Kurds as victims of the Turkish Republic. Kurdish historiography, the least developed of the three, has been preoccupied with the "failure" of Kurds to achieve a nation-state of their own. It has preferred to downplay conflict with Armenians in favor of emphasizing struggles for ethno-national self-determination against the Turkish, Arab, and Iranian states.

Turkish historiography in turn has steadfastly elided connections between the destruction of Christian Anatolians and the subsequent formation of the Turkish Republic, instead presenting the former as an unfortunate and unintended consequence of World War I and the later exchange of populations with Greece. Although Turkish historians routinely highlight the role of the European powers in inciting Ottoman Christian separatism, they have been less keen to draw attention to similar involvement with the Kurds, as this would both undermine claims of European bias against Muslims and call attention to the presence of Kurds in eastern Anatolia, an uncomfortable fact for the Turkish Republic's preferred portrait of Anatolia as the indisputable homeland of Turks. In short, none of the three branches of Anatolian historiography has been eager to explore the story of Russian–Kurdish relations because this would undermine cherished assumptions.

Disinterest and reticence notwithstanding, several important works on Russian–Kurdish relations have been published. Absolutely essential is M. S. Lazarev's *Kurdskii vopros (1891–1917)* (The Kurdish Question, 1891–1917), which makes heavy use of Russian sources to describe Kurdish efforts at political mobilization in the Ottoman Empire and Persia in its chosen period.[4] The book presents an abundance of detail on the dealings of Russian officials with

[4] M. S. Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros (1891–1917)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972).

Kurdish figures. Another especially useful book is Dzhalile Dzhalil's study of the "socio-political life" of the Kurds.[5] A Kurd educated in the Soviet Union, Dzhalil seeks to document and describe the political mobilization of Ottoman Kurds, and toward that end he makes extensive use of Russian and some Armenian materials. In English there is Manoug Joseph Somakian's *Empires in Conflict,* which draws in part on Russian archives to argue that Russia's Kurdish policies had a calculated anti-Armenian instrumentality, a contrast to Lazarev's tendency to downplay the coherence of those policies.[6] While these works offer important insights, I propose that there was indeed a logic that guided Russia in its dealings with the Kurdish tribes of Anatolia, but that it was a logic of imperial security, not anti-Armenian animus.[7]

As for the Kurds, their motives for dealing with Russia were complex and mixed. At the center of the Russian–Kurdish relationship was a disinherited prince and former Ottoman diplomat turned Kurdish patriot and Russophile by the name of Abdürrezzak Bedirhan. From his birth in 1864 until his capture in Georgia and execution in 1918 by the Ottomans, Abdürrezzak's life was intertwined with the struggle for control of the Russo-Ottoman borderlands and the transformation of imperial rule and identities in eastern Anatolia. Dispossessed by one empire—the Ottoman—the Kurdish notable looked to another—the Russian—to fulfill his dual aspirations of reclaiming his lost patrimony and creating a Kurdish nation. Russia to him represented more than merely a patron strong enough to drive the Ottoman state out of Kurdistan. Russia represented also a gateway to the forms of knowledge and culture that would enable the tribal Kurds to develop a unifying national consciousness and acquire the skills they needed in a world where prosperity and even survival increasingly depended upon literacy, education, and economic productivity. Although a tribal scion in search of an imperial sponsor, Abdürrezzak foreshadowed the future politics of national liberation. He saw himself as a national leader engaged in a comprehensive struggle to free "his people" not merely from oppressive political rule but also from the burden of a culture that threatened to doom them. Unfolding at

[5] Dzhalile Dzhalil, *Iz istorii obshchestvenno-politicheskoi zhizni kurdov v kontse XIX–nachale XX vv*. (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1997). A much shorter but nonetheless useful work that Dzhalil edited is the "autobiography" of Abdürrezzak Bedirhan, which consists of two lengthy autobiographical statements translated into Turkish and Kurdish in a single volume. Abdurrezak [sic] Bedirhan, *Abdurrezak Bedirhan: Otobiyografya*, ed. Celîlê Celîl and trans. Hasan Cunî (Istanbul: Peri Yayınları, 2000).

[6] Manoug Joseph Somakian, *Empires in Conflict: Armenia and the Great Powers, 1895–1920* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995).

[7] I elaborate on this proposition in *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. 46–81.

the dusk of dynastic empire, his story reveals the outlines of a new world order that was dawning.

From Backwater to Back Door

Abdürrezzak was born the eldest of eight siblings. He was the son of Mehmed Necib Pasha and the grandson of Bedirhan, the emir of Bohtan in southeastern Anatolia and the "most illustrious of an illustrious dynasty" of Kurdish emirs.[8] Abdürrezzak's birthplace, however, was not Bohtan but Istanbul. Seventeen years prior to Abdürrezzak's birth, Sultan Abdülmecid had destroyed the emirate of Bohtan, the last autonomous Kurdish principality. The destruction of Bedirhan's emirate marked the culmination of what has been called the second reconquest of Kurdistan. The first conquest had taken place a little over three centuries earlier when Sultan Selim the Grim momentarily turned his empire's attention from the Balkans to the east. In Iran, a teenaged man named Ismail had declared himself shah, founding a Shiite dynasty known as the Safavid. This upstart posed not just a martial threat to the Ottomans but also an ideological challenge to the Sunni Ottomans' legitimacy as defenders of the faith of Islam. Selim understood that the key to Ottoman security in the marchlands of eastern Anatolia was the Sunni Kurdish tribesmen, the dominant element in the region. Appealing to a shared attachment to Sunni Islam, he rallied the tribes to his side and went on to defeat Ismail at the battle of Çaldıran in 1514. With the Safavids contained, Istanbul was content to turn from the east. For the next three centuries, the sultans preferred to leave eastern Anatolia a backwater and rule it indirectly through Kurdish emirs like Abdürrezzak's forefathers.

In the 19th century, however, Istanbul fundamentally changed its calculus regarding eastern Anatolia. Having suffered a string of devastating reversals at the hands of its European rivals—especially Russia—over the course of the previous century, it arrived at a clear prognosis. If it did not restructure the empire's institutions along the lines of a contemporary European state, the empire's relative weakness would only grow and eventually the empire would succumb to partition. Thus in 1834 Istanbul embarked on a comprehensive effort at institutional reform known as the *Tanzimat*, or "restructuring." Centralization of imperial administration was a key component of the Tanzimat, and as a step toward

[8] Abdurrezak Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya (1910–1916),* trans. Celile Celil [Dzhalile Dzhalil] and Hasan Cunî (Ankara: Perî Yayınları, 2000), 14; Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 79; David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 3rd rev. ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 45–47. See also [G. Elphinston], "The Azizan or the Princes of Bhotan" [sic], *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 36, 3 (1949): 249–51; and Malmîsanij, *Cızira Botanlı Bedirhaniler ve Bedirhani Ailesi Derneği'nin Tutanakları* (Spanga, Sweden: APEC, 1994), 82.

establishing direct rule over eastern Anatolia, Istanbul proceeded to crush the region's Kurdish emirates.

Russia's territorial expansion to the south was an additional factor spurring Istanbul's determination to assert direct rule over eastern Anatolia. Russia's acquisition of Kartli-Kakheti (Georgia) in 1801 had brought Russia to the edge of eastern Anatolia. During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1828–29, the Russian army advanced across the Anatolian plateau all the way to Erzurum, and by 1864 St. Petersburg had consolidated its control of the Caucasus. No longer could Istanbul dismiss eastern Anatolia as a region of marginal strategic importance. It was now a back door into the Ottoman Empire. Thus it was partially with the intent of keeping that door shut and Russia out that Istanbul destroyed the Kurdish emirates.

The destruction of the emirates did not, however, yield enhanced control but compounded the disarray. The large tribal confederations had maintained a degree of order in the region, and by shattering them Istanbul created hundreds of smaller autonomous entities, all free to contest one another. Because state institutions had little legitimacy and were as yet too weak to fill the newly created vacuum, the attempted centralization only initiated a sustained period of political turmoil, as intertribal conflict broke out across eastern Anatolia.[9]

Politics were only one factor stoking conflict in the region. Changing economic relations combined with European influence were transforming intercommunal relations and subtly but palpably eroding the traditional social order. For centuries, nomadic or seminomadic Kurdish tribal leaders and landholders, or *agha*s, had loomed supreme over the sedentary population, which included Kurds but consisted primarily of the Christian Armenian peasantry. The tribes exacted from the peasants a number of customary concessions, such as the so-called *kışlak*, the prerogative of nomads to take winter quarter in peasant homes after they returned from the highlands with their livestock.[10] This is not to say that relations between the predominantly Kurdish nomads and the heavily Armenian peasantry were uniformly exploitative. They could be, and often were, symbiotic, with both sides benefiting from the specialization offered by the other. Even so, relations were inherently unequal. Landowners bought and sold Armenian peasants along with the land on which they lived and extracted a portion of the peasants' harvests. Such conditions led observers from the Russian

[9] Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State* (London: Zed Books, 1992), 181; McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 38–47; Hamit Bozarslan, "Tribal *Asabiyya* and Kurdish Politics," in *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics,* ed. Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawod (London: Saqi Books, 2006), 135.

[10] Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation,* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), 89, 137; van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*,107.

Empire to compare the status of Armenian peasants to that of serfs.[11] Islamic norms that prescribed the subordination of non-Muslims to Muslims reinforced the status quo and embedded it in religious identities.

Economics and Europe's impact, however, challenged those norms and began to undermine the status quo in three ways. First, the integration of eastern Anatolia into the global economy was raising the value of agricultural produce, thereby making ownership of land more remunerative and, consequently, more contentious.[12] Second, the arrival of European merchants, businessmen, and capital was opening opportunities for trade and new avenues for economic advancement. As Christians, the Armenians found it easier to form contacts and relationships with these Europeans. Third, the growing numbers of Christian missionaries from Europe introduced new ways of learning and social organization through schools and other institutions.[13] Skills taught by the missionaries, such as literacy, were essential to prosperity in a globalizing economy. The sectarian nature of the missionaries, however, meant that their impact upon Kurds and Armenians was sharply differentiated. Whereas Armenians eagerly enrolled their children in missionary schools, Muslims avoided them. Yet outside of traditional madrasas, Muslims in eastern Anatolia had little access to education. The result was a rapidly widening gap in education. Whereas on the eve of World War I the majority of Armenian children in the countryside as well as in towns attended schools (often run by Christian missionaries) and literacy was becoming universal for Armenian boys,[14] not a single Kurd was attending high school as late as 1912.[15] The combined effect of these changes was to enable significant numbers of Armenians to become upwardly mobile in the merchant and semi-industrial classes. The majority of Armenians remained peasants, but the trend was clear: Armenians were ascending in economic, if not yet political, strength.

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[11] Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 40; R. Bekguliants, *Po Turetskoi Armenii* (Rostov on Don: Ia. M. Iskidarov, 1914), 74–75.

[12] Janet Klein, "Conflict and Collaboration: Rethinking Kurdish–Armenian Relations in the Hamidian Period, 1876–1909," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 13, 1–2 (2007): 158–61.

[13] For more, see John Joseph, *The Nestorians and Their Muslim Neighbors: A Study of Western Influence on Their Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); Jeremy Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism, and the Ottoman Armenians, 1878–1896* (London: Frank Cass, 1993). For a generally more positive portrayal of the role of missionaries, see Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Der verpasste Friede: Mission, Ethnie, und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der Türkei, 1839–1938* (Zurich: Chronos, 2000).

[14] Richard G. Hovannisian, "Armenian Tsopk/Kharpert," in *Armenian Tsopk/Kharpert*, ed. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2002), 3.

[15] Kieser, *Der verpasste Friede*, 430.

Shifts in the Global Order, Tremors in Local Politics

During the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877–78, Russia defeated the Ottoman Empire once again, and its army penetrated into Anatolia as far as Erzurum. In March 1878, the two sides signed a peace treaty in the village of San Stefano. The other great powers, however, feared the extent of Russia's gains and, led by Britain, convoked a conference that summer in Berlin to adjudicate a new peace. After a month of talks, the powers compelled Russia to accept a new treaty and limited its gains in the Balkans and Anatolia. It was an impressive multilateral mobilization of diplomatic power to reverse gains obtained through military conquest.[16]

More significant than the Congress of Berlin's revision of the balance of power between states was the way it reordered relations between states and restructured state legitimacy. The congress established three new independent states—Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania—and a new autonomous one, Bulgaria. In the process, it laid out "the contours of a system that defined majorities and minorities in ethnic and national terms,"[17] and implicitly tied the legitimacy of a state to the extent and degree to which it represented the ethnicity of its inhabitants. By recognizing ethnicity as a legitimizing criterion of sovereignty, the congress shook up local politics throughout Eastern Europe and the Near East alike, as "Bulgarians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Romanians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Jews, and others all began to claim their rights to a separate existence, justifying such rights by the unique nature of their cultures."[18]

The treaty had a direct impact on social relations in eastern Anatolia by making the security of Ottoman Armenians an international matter. Whereas in the Treaty of San Stefano Russia had reserved the right to maintain its army in eastern Anatolia until such time as the Ottomans could guarantee the security of the Armenians and had carried out reforms to that end, the Treaty of Berlin assigned all the powers the prerogative—albeit not the obligation—to intervene should the Porte fail to implement "reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds."[19]

[16] M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question, 1774–1923: A Study in International Relations* (New York: St. Martin's, 1966), 203–19.

[17] Eric D. Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *American Historical Review* 113, 5 (2008): 1319.

[18] Jerzy Jedlicki, *A Suburb of Europe: Nineteenth-Century Polish Approaches to Western Civilization* (Budapest: Central European University Press, [1988,] 1999), 260; Kemal H. Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 183.

[19] Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire," 210.

The reaction from the region came swiftly. The Treaty of Berlin and the example of Bulgaria inspired Armenians to dream of establishing an Armenian state. For precisely the same reason, the settlement sparked fears of the same among the Kurds. These fears contributed to a major revolt of Ottoman and Iranian Kurds in 1880 led by a Kurd named Sheikh Ubeydullah. Ubeydullah saw the shift in the international balance of power and understood the utility of having a great-power patron. Adopting the discourse of ethno-nationalism that was coming to define the global order, he appealed to the British in the idiom of the nation, telling them that "the Kurdish nation … is a people apart" and that "We want our affairs to be in our own hands."[20] Ubeydullah's following began to dissipate within several weeks, however, and the Persian army managed to put down the revolt, albeit only after tremendous loss of life. Ubeydullah was captured and exiled to Istanbul, where he died within two years. Its brief span notwithstanding, Ubeydullah's revolt was significant not simply for its size and destructiveness, but even more so for the way it reflected emerging intercommunal anxieties, the increasing importance of European powers in local politics, and the creeping impact of the national idea.

Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909) understood from the defeats of 1877–78 and the revolt of Ubeydullah that neither the loyalty of the region's Kurds nor continued possession of eastern Anatolia could be taken for granted. The drive for centralization had alienated many Kurds and had failed to produce new institutions to bind the populace to the state. The resources available to Abdülhamid II for building such institutions or coercing obedience were even more limited. The war with Russia had devastated the empire's already fragile finances, and the multitude of other demands pressing upon the Porte was only growing.[21] Abdülhamid II therefore opted to try to coopt, not subdue, the tribal chiefs. Inspired in part by the example of the Cossacks as a martial entity in the borderlands loyal to the dynastic center, in 1891 he began enrolling Kurdish chiefs in eponymous auxiliary cavalry regiments known as the "Hamidiye Alayları." In return for promises of allegiance, the sultan plied the chiefs with ranks, orders, money, and guns. The project was a success to the extent that it enrolled tribal leaders who pledged their loyalty to the sultan, but that success was purchased in part at the expense of the region's more vulnerable populations. The Hamidiye

[20] McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 53; Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origin and Development* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 80–83; Hakan Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 74–77.

[21] Engin Akarlı, "The Problems of External Pressures, Power Struggle, and Budgetary Deficits in Ottoman Politics under Abdulhamid II (1876–1909): Origins and Solutions" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1976).

commanders used their privileges and arms to exert their authority on those around them and to seize land. The comparatively defenseless Armenians especially suffered significant losses of land.[22]

Worse was to come. By the beginning of the 1890s, Armenian activists were agitating inside the Ottoman Empire and the capitals of Europe for the implementation of the reforms promised a decade and a half earlier at Berlin. Influenced by Russian Armenians who had acquired ideas of revolution and tactics of terror from Russian revolutionary circles, Armenian revolutionaries had begun mounting small-scale attacks on Ottoman officials and Kurds alike. In 1894, Armenians in Bitlis province took up arms and refused to pay the customary tribute to their Kurdish overlords and taxes to government officials. The latter in response charged the Armenians with sedition and, after suppressing the rebels, massacred their villages. The atrocity, however, attracted attention from European circles and inspired more Armenian protests and demonstrations until the following year, when Muslims initiated a series of massacres throughout Anatolia that lasted into 1896 and resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Armenians.[23] Fears that the Armenians might follow the Bulgarian precedent and establish a state in formerly Muslim lands were a primary motivation behind the massacres.[24] At the same time, Hamidiye chiefs availed themselves of the opportunity to expropriate more Armenian lands, including church lands. Although the precise degree of Abdülhamid II's involvement in the massacres is not known, it is clear that at a minimum he abetted them.[25]

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[22] For more on the Hamidiye, see Bayram Kodaman, *Sultan II Abdülhamid Devri Doğu Anadolu Politikası* (Ankara: Türk Kültürü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1987); Stephen Duguid, "The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9, 2 (1973): 145–55; and Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, forthcoming 2011).

[23] Louise Nalbandian, *The Armenian Revolutionary Movement: The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 120–28. There are no precise figures for the number of victims, and estimates vary considerably. Christopher Walker suggests 100,000 dead: Walker, *Survival of a Nation*, 165. Margaret Anderson surmises 200,000 or more: Margaret Lavinia Anderson, "'Down in Turkey Far Away': Human Rights, the Armenian Massacres, and Orientalism in Wilhelmine Germany," *Journal of Modern History* 79, 1 (2007): 82. A commission of representatives of the six great powers estimated deaths at about 25,000, while the U.S. consul put the number at 37,085. See Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: Statistics and the Armenian Question, 1878–1918* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 144–45.

[24] Selim Deringil, "'The Armenian Question Is Finally Closed': Mass Conversions of Armenians in Anatolia during the Hamidian Massacres of 1895–1897," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, 2 (2009): 344–71.

[25] Walker, *Survival of a Nation*, 150–76; See also Deringil, "Armenian Question."

As the massacres unfolded, European public audiences and diplomats alike debated the need to intervene on behalf of the Armenians as provided for by the Treaty of Berlin. Russia, however, made sure to block any action lest another power, especially Britain, seize an advantage. The powers thus remained passive, and the promise of the treaty proved hollow.[26] The condominium between Abdülhamid II and the tribal chiefs held, but among dispossessed Kurds resentment toward the Ottoman center persisted.

Abdürrezzak's Early Years

Abdürrezzak grew up in the place of his birth, Istanbul, where he received an education at the hands of his clansman, the well-known Kurdish intellectual Hacı Kadiri Koy. Abdülhamid II's program of cooptation had not extended to reviving the emirates or compensating their heirs. Partly as a result, the sultan's relationship with the Bedirhan clan was strained. Some of the Bedirhans attempted rebellions back in Bohtan.[27] Others took up the pen to fight the Hamidian regime. Thus Abdürrezzak's uncles, the brothers Mikdat Midhat and Abdurrahman Sami Bedirhan, founded and edited the expatriate newspaper *Kurdistan,* wherein they blasted the Hamidian regime as an impediment to the Kurds' achievement of knowledge and progress. Where the Hamidiye commanders were collaborating with Abdülhamid II to bolster their dominance, these Bedirhans and other Kurdish intellectuals in cities such as Istanbul, Cairo, and Geneva fretted that the pious and autocratic sultan's rule was condemning the Kurds to perpetual impoverishment and thus, ultimately, to outside domination. Like many Muslim intellectuals around the world in that era, they saw education as the key to security and advancement. As one proclamation from 1898 put it: "Oh, Kurds! Our century is the century of science. The time of performing heroic deeds in the mountains has passed, all nations now study in schools, and thanks to education they are seizing their right to freedom from usurpers."[28]

The Bedirhans were not inconsequential opponents. The Bedirhan name commanded tremendous respect among tribes in the east, and figures such as Abdurrahman and Mikdat Bedirhan had political connections beyond their region. They moved in opposition circles abroad, mixing with the same Young Turks who would later bring down Abdülhamid II. Abdurrahman even became a minor celebrity in Europe when he married the daughter of a Swiss aristocrat.[29]

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[26] Richard Hovannisian, "The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire," *East European Quarterly* 6, 1 (1972): 9.

[27] McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds*, 90.

[28] As cited in Dzhalil, *Iz istorii*, 38.

[29] Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi Kurdıstan'ı Yayımlayan Abdurrahman Bedirhan (1868–1936)* (Istanbul: Vate Yayınevi, 2009), 22–26.

After completing his education in Istanbul and acquiring fluency in French, Abdürrezzak aspired to go to Paris to continue his studies. A suspicious Abdülhamid II blocked him, and he entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instead. After three or four years of service, he was posted in the early 1890s to the Ottoman Embassy in St. Petersburg as the third secretary. There he studied Russian and, in recognition of his positive attitude toward Russia, the Russians awarded him the Order of St. Stanislav of the second degree.[30] Although Abdürrezzak never related precisely how his stint in St. Petersburg affected him, there is no doubt that the effect was profound. He would soon reveal himself as an advocate not merely of Kurdish secession from the Ottoman Empire but of union with Russia and the spread of Russian culture, language, and literature among the Kurds.

When exactly Abdürrezzak openly entered into opposition to the Hamidian regime is not clear. After returning from St. Petersburg to Istanbul he was next assigned as second secretary to the embassy in Tehran in 1894. Before the young diplomat made it to Iran, however, Abdülhamid II recalled him to the Ottoman capital. Sensing that his freedom was in danger, Abdürrezzak chose to flee to the Russian port of Sevastopol´.[31] From there he went to Tiflis. Meeting with Russian officials, he offered to lead a rebellion in eastern Anatolia against Abdülhamid II in exchange for Russian patronage and protection. The Russians turned down this initial offer; and, heeding his father's call, he returned to Istanbul.[32]

Back in Istanbul, Abdürrezzak had no real choice but to continue to put his talents to work in state service. He rose in the ranks of the Ottoman bureaucracy and became one of Abdülhamid II's chamberlains. He was at ease mixing with Europeans. He preferred the European style of dress—a habit he would retain even when moving about eastern Anatolia later in his life—and often dropped in upon European circles for dinner and games of bridge. The British diplomat Sir Telford Waugh knew Abdürrezzak as "an intelligent and amusing companion" who during the Boer War would tease British officials by declaring himself an honorary Boer and promising to give his daughter to a Boer.[33]

According to Abdürrezzak's own testimony, however, life in Istanbul was not all cocktail parties and card games. No matter how well he served, he

[30] Dzhalil, *Iz istorii*, 91.

[31] Ibid., 92.

[32] Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya*, 14. British consuls at the time were aware of Abdürrezzak's negotiations with the Russians. See Janet Klein, "Power in the Periphery: The Hamidiye Light Cavalry and the Struggle over Ottoman Kurdistan, 1890–1914" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003), 179.

[33] Telford Waugh, *Turkey: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1930), 96.

complained, the Hamidian regime remained distrustful of him. He experienced numerous problems and at one point felt compelled to turn to the Russian embassy for help. Although the details of his dilemma are not known, he credited the embassy staff, albeit perhaps melodramatically, with saving his life.[34] In public, at least, he managed to avoid major trouble for some years, but then in 1906 he was implicated in the murder of the prefect of Istanbul, the Albanian Major Rıdvan Pasha.[35] Abdülhamid II, acting upon the advice of his grand vizier, who suspected a plot to overthrow the sultan, had Abdürrezzak arrested and then exiled to Tripoli, along with his uncles Ali Şamil, Abdurrahman Sami, Mikdat Midhat, and at least 174—perhaps even thousands of—others. Most of these were Bedirhans, but among the exiles were some of Abdürrezzak's neighbors, one man discovered to be in possession of a photograph of Abdürrezzak, and several others falsely identified as Bedirhans.[36]

The 1908 Revolution and the Rise of the Committee of Union and Progress

Abdülhamid II's Kurdish opponents—like their counterparts from the Turkish, Albanian, Greek, Armenian, and other communities—rejoiced when in July 1908 army officers belonging to the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) mutinied and compelled Abdülhamid II to reinstate the constitution he had suspended in 1878. Known as the Young Turk Revolution, this restoration of constitutional freedoms permitted, among other things, the establishment of ethnic associations and organizations. Kurdish activists thereupon founded several organizations dedicated to the pursuit of education and enlightenment among

[34] Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya*, 16, 22.

[35] The murder took place on 23 March 1906. The enmity between Abdürrezzak and Rıdvan was part of a larger Kurdish–Albanian rivalry being played out in Istanbul. Starting in 1896, large numbers of Kurds were brought into Istanbul to replace Armenian porters and dock workers. The influx of Kurdish laborers in turn created tension with the Albanians. Abdülhamid II's grand vizier was also prominent in the Albanian community, and the Albanian rivalry with the Kurds in Istanbul explains in part why he wanted to see Abdürrezzak expelled. For more on Abdürrezzak's role in the assassination of Rıdvan Pasha, see Halide Edib (Adıvar), *Memoirs of Halide Edib* (New York: Century, 1926), 222–23; Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State*, 95; and Sir Andrew Ryan, *The Last of the Dragomans* (London: Geoffrey Bless, 1951), 41. For more on dock workers and labor strife in Istanbul, see Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881–1908* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), 95–120.

[36] Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi*, 38–46. Malmîsanij identified 178 exiles by name but notes the existence of sources putting the numbers at several hundred and even thousands. Abdürrezzak himself gave a figure of three thousand. See Vice-Consul in Hoy to the First Department, December 1913 [day not specified], Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi imperii (AVPRI) f. 180 (Posol´stvo v Konstantinopole), op. 517/2, d. 3573, l. 232.

Kurds.[37] As most histories of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution dutifully explain, the end of Hamidian despotism and the promise of constitutional liberties inspired celebrations across ethnic and sectarian lines. Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Albanians, and others embraced and even danced together in public.

Not all, however, rejoiced at the old order's demise. Indeed, the tribal chiefs of eastern Anatolia exhibited a wholly opposite reaction. When Millî İbrahim Pasha, perhaps the most powerful and notorious of the Hamidiye commanders, received news from Istanbul of the constitution's restoration, he rose in rebellion instantly. He understood that as a favored beneficiary of Abdülhamid II he now stood to lose everything. The new government responded forcefully, and a month later the Ottoman army slew İbrahim Pasha on the battlefield. The army managed to contain a series of related rebellions that rippled through Anatolia that summer and fall.[38]

Millî İbrahim Pasha had not feared in vain. The new force in Ottoman politics, the Committee of Union and Progress, was indeed determined to end the dominance of the tribal chiefs. First, the Unionists regarded centralization of rule as a *sine qua non* for saving the Ottoman Empire. Only by maximizing the state's ability to extract resources from what territories it still held could the empire have a chance at survival. Centralization required subduing and displacing the tribal elites. Another prerequisite of maintaining the empire was preserving the internal unity of its different peoples, or "elements." The equality before the law of all Ottoman subjects regardless of faith or ethnicity was a central rhetorical theme of the 1908 revolution. The Unionists were, at least initially, committed to fulfilling this rhetoric and, by extension, to overturning the traditional dominance of Muslim Kurds over Christian Armenians.

Thus, right after quelling the summer rebellions, the new government launched a comprehensive crackdown on lawbreakers throughout eastern Anatolia. It appointed aggressive administrators to eastern Anatolia and arrested

[37] These organizations included the Kürdistan Teali ve Terakki Cemiyeti (The Society for the Rise and Progress of Kurdistan), Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Kurdish Society for Mutual Aid and Progress), and the Kürt Neşri Maarif Cemiyeti (Kurdish Society for the Propagation of Education). See Dzhalile Dzhalil, "Pervye kurdskie obshchestvenno-politicheskie organizatsii," *Tiurkologicheskii sbornik 1973* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975): 172–75; and Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement,* 104–5.

[38] Kamal Madhar Ahmad, *Kurdistan during the First World War* (London: Saqi Books, 1994), 59; van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State*, 187–89; V. A. Gordlevskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia* (Moscow: Izdatel´stvo vostochnoi literatury, 1962), 3:116; M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 106–7; Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 37, 115–16, 148–49. İbrahim Pasha's recruitment of brigands seems to have been as nondiscriminatory as his exploitation. Among the ranks of his armed men could be found Turks, Armenians, and Arabs as well as Kurds. See E. B. Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise,* 2nd ed. (London: J. Murray, [1912,] 1926), 43, 66.

known bandits and other scofflaws, including Hamidiye commanders.[39] This initial effort to impose order was markedly successful. The Russian consul in Bitlis recorded the decrease in banditry and lawlessness with approval, writing in March 1909, "due to the new government's policy the Kurds have become unrecognizable."[40] British consuls and Armenian revolutionaries similarly noted the vast improvement.[41] The new regime permitted Armenians to carry arms and then in 1909 made them eligible for conscription. The idea that Christians would not only bear arms but henceforth even serve in the sultan's army offended many Kurds and further aggravated their relations with the government.[42] Still worse was that the emboldened Armenians were pressing for the return of confiscated lands, thereby threatening a reopening of the explosive "land" or "agrarian question."[43]

These sharp changes bewildered the Kurds. The state's vigorous assertion of its own power and its defense of the legal rights of the Armenians were upending the old order. The tribal elites found themselves facing an aggressive state apparatus that was backing an assertive Armenian community that through educational and economic achievement had already begun eroding Kurdish predominance. As one Russian analysis observed in January 1910, "Feeling their strength, they [the Armenians], in alliance with the Young Turks, began to avenge themselves upon on the Kurds for the former, old offenses. The Kurds, who are not used to this kind of treatment, await further developments in a state of incomprehension."[44]

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[39] Not all the Hamidiye commanders were producers of banditry and disorder. Some, including Milli İbrahim Pasha, can be seen also as providers of order and security. See Joost Jongerden, "Urban Nationalists and Rural Ottomanists: Ziya Gökalp, Millî İbrahim Paşa, and the Political Struggle over Land and People in Diyarbekir" (paper presented at the Middle East Studies Association Annual Conference, Boston, November 2009). Nevertheless, from the standpoint of the Ottoman state they had to be eliminated because their very existence challenged the state's claim to a monopoly on violence.

[40] Somakian, *Empires in Conflict,* 38.

[41] Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule, 1908–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 96; See also F. N. Heazell and Mrs. Margoliouth, eds., *Kurds and Christians* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton, 1913), 204.

[42] Erik J. Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice," in *Arming the State: Military Conscription in Central Asia and the Middle East,* ed. Zürcher (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 88–89; M. S. Lazarev et al., eds., *Istoriia Kurdistana* (Moscow: Institut vostokovedeniia RAN, 1999), 209; M. A. Gasratian, M. S. Lazarev, and Sh. Kh. Mgoian, eds., *Kurdskoe dvizhenie v novoe i noveishee vremia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987), 59.

[43] On this, the so-called "agrarian question," see Klein, "Power in the Periphery," 256–340; and Kaligian, *Armenian Organization*, 53–66.

[44] Caucasus Military District to Quartermaster General of the General Staff, 5 January 1910 [18 January 1910], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3572, ll. 15–17; Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 58.

The Origins of Ottoman Kurdish–Russian Cooperation

But the Kurds had an alternative to submission. Following Istanbul's announcement of its plan to disband the Hamidiye and reconstitute the regiments in a different form, the chief of the Heyderanli tribe and influential Hamidiye commander Kör Hüseyin Pasha in early 1910 crossed into Russian-occupied Iran and took with him with several other commanders and their regiments.[45] Inside Iran these and increasing numbers of other Ottoman Kurds began applying for Russian subject status, a development that unsettled and acutely embarrassed Istanbul.[46] The former servant of the sultan Kör Hüseyin went further and offered the Russian viceroy of the Caucasus Illarion Ivanovich Vorontsov-Dashkov to hand over all Kurdistan to Russia.[47]

Meanwhile, the Kurd who would prove to be the strongest proponent of cooperation with Russia continued to languish in a prison cell, often in solitary confinement.[48] Abdurrahman, Mikdat, and several other Bedirhans obtained release from prison at the end of 1908 through a general amnesty granted to political prisoners after the 1908 revolution.[49] Because he had been implicated in a murder, however, Abdürrezzak was not eligible for release and gained his freedom only in the spring of 1910. From Tripoli he returned to Istanbul, where he found his home and property in ruins. Although the Unionists had deposed Abdülhamid II the year before, the former prisoner had no sympathy for them. Shortly after his return to Istanbul, he concluded that the Ottoman state had no interest in the needs of the "Kurdish people,"[50] and so he informed his associates in Istanbul that he was leaving for Kurdistan "to civilise his people."[51]

The path to civilization that Abdürrezzak chose lay through Russia. In late July, he sent a letter to the Russian ambassador explaining his suffering in jail and requesting Russian subject status. To the Russians he denounced the Unionists as "Jesuits who would not hesitate to employ any means for their

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[45] Caucasus Military District to Quartermaster General of the General Staff, 5 January 1910 [18 January 1910], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3572, ll. 15–17; Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 150–53; Gordlevskii, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, 2:128.

[46] Interior Ministry Directorate of Public Communications to Van, 25 Kanun-i Evvel 1326 [7 January 1911]; Deputy Vali to the Interior Ministry, 21 Nisan 1327 [4 May 1911], Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA) [Prime Ministerial Ottoman Archive] Dahiliye Nezareti Siyasi Kısım (DH SYS) [Interior Ministry Political Section] Dosya (D.) 8-1, Sıra (S.) 1–7.

[47] Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros,*157.

[48] Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi*, 74.

[49] Ibid., 78–81.

[50] Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya*, 24.

[51] Telford Waugh, *Turkey: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1930), 97.

ends" and as "murderers terrorizing the country."[52] The embassy, suspicious that Abdürrezzak might be an Ottoman agent, apparently hesitated to approve his request. Nonetheless, he left Istanbul on the pretext of commercial business, and already by August he was in eastern Anatolia praising the "blessedness of Russian rule" and distributing pamphlets that pushed the idea of a Kurdish "beylik" or principality.[53] In September, he made another formal application to the Russian government for Russian subject status and requested permission to settle in Erevan. This time the embassy in Istanbul and the authorities in the Caucasus responded positively. They objected initially only to his desire to settle so close to the border. Six months later, however, the Ministry of the Interior approved Abdürrezzak's requests both to become a Russian subject and to settle in Erevan.[54]

Abdürrezzak and Kör Hüseyin were not the only Kurds who turned to the Russian authorities for backing. Simko, Sheikh Taha, and another leading Kurd named Sheikh Seyid Ali also availed themselves of Russian support, but the Russians favored Abdürrezzak for three reasons. First, he hailed from a prestigious dynasty and thus, the Russians hoped, could command loyalty from the Kurds at large. The second was his familiarity with Russia. He had been personally acquainted with Russian officials for many years. Even after leaving his post in St. Petersburg, he had continued to maintain contacts with Russian officials. Third, he admired the achievements of Russian culture and envisioned a long-term partnership between the Kurds and Russia. Through exposure to Russia and Russian culture, Abdürrezzak believed, the Kurds could access the forms of knowledge and learning that they desperately needed. This would facilitate the emergence of a new generation of educated Kurds with a nationalist consciousness. Abdürrezzak's ambitions were not focused solely on a Kurdish nation. His resentment of the Ottoman state for depriving him of his patrimony was strong, and he saw Russia as the best candidate to expel the Ottomans from eastern Anatolia and thereby enable him to regain that patrimony. Both strains—that of the intellectual pursuing the enlightenment of his people and that of the disinherited tribal chief—informed his attraction to Russia.

The Russians' interest in the Kurds was not a recent phenomenon, but dated back to as early as 1787 when Catherine the Great commissioned the publication

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[52] Telegram of Kokhanovskii, 15 May 1911 [28 May 1911], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3572, l. 71.

[53] Somakian, *Empires in Conflict*, 51.

[54] Dispatch to K. E. Argirapulo, Copy of Letter of G. Tovarishch of the Ministry of the Interior from 3 March 1911 [16 March 1911], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3572, ll. 61, 67.

of a Kurdish grammar.[55] During the 19th century, the Russian army acquired a heightened interest in the Kurds when it began employing auxiliary Kurdish units in its wars with the Iranians and Ottomans. By the turn of the century, the Russian army was systematically gathering information on the numbers and characteristics of the Kurds of eastern Anatolia and Iran.[56]

Russia's interest in the Kurds was threefold. First, its administrators had to deal with Kurds in the South Caucasus and, after the occupation of northern Iran, with Kurds in that country. Second, eastern Anatolia was becoming a region of greater concern to Russia. Paradoxically, it was Ottoman weakness, not strength, that most worried Russian policymakers. The Ottoman Empire had long ceased to pose a direct threat to Russia, but its weakness had transformed this region on Russia's southern border into a contested territory where Britain, France, and Germany were all jockeying for advantage by building railroads, supporting missionaries, opening schools, and cultivating local contacts and ties. At a minimum, influence among the Kurds could be of use to Russia in its efforts to compete with and stymie its rivals.

Third, tsarist officials were interested in the Kurds of Anatolia because they represented the flip side to the Armenian Question. The Ottoman Empire was not unique in having an Armenian Question. Russia had one, too. Russian Armenians were prominent in Russia's revolutionary underground and had played the leading roles in the major transimperial Armenian revolutionary organizations. The revolutionaries' radical and anticlerical views, however, had long kept them on the margins of Russia's Armenian community. This changed in 1903, when in a bid to preempt the growth of separatist sentiment the tsarist administration expropriated Armenian church lands and insisted on the teaching of Russian and the adoption of Russian-style curricula in Armenian schools. The effort backfired. It spurred the revolutionaries and their opponents in Armenian society to come together in a campaign of resistance and terror that claimed

[55] A. A. Vigasin et al., eds., *Istoriia otechestvennogo vostokovedeniia s serediny XIX veka do 1917 goda* (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura RAN, 1997), 215; Ismet Cheriff Vanly, "The Kurds in the Soviet Union," in *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview*, ed. Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl (London: Routledge, 1992), 198.

[56] P. I. Aver´ianov, *Kurdy v voinakh Rossii s Persiei i Turtsiei v techenie deviatnadtsatogo stoletiia: Sovremennoe politicheskoe polozhenie turetskikh, persidskikh i russkikh kurdov* (Tiflis: Otdela General´nogo shtaba pri Shtabe Kavkazskogo voennogo okruga, 1904). The Russian army's interest in ethnography was not exceptional but part of a pan-European interest in "population politics." See Peter Holquist, "To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia," in *A State of Nations*, ed. Terry Martin and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 111–44.

the lives of scores of tsarist bureaucrats.[57] The Russian government reversed its policies in 1905, but the damage had been done. Much of the Armenian revolutionary movement persisted in regarding the tsarist regime, not the Ottoman, as its primary opponent.[58] Prime Minister Petr Stolypin's subsequent 1908 campaign against all revolutionary groups inside Russia caused the Dashnaktsutiun to move its organizations from Russia to Istanbul, Van, and northern Iran. From those locations, the Dashnaks mounted operations against the Russian Empire, at times with assistance from the Unionists and other Ottomans.[59] It is no surprise that surveillance of Armenian revolutionaries constituted a primary mission of Russian intelligence assets in the Ottoman Empire.[60]

Thus, when tsarist policymakers contemplated the future of eastern Anatolia, they recognized an "Armenian dilemma" of their own. The extension of Russian control over eastern Anatolia would, given Russia's dominion over the other major Armenian communities in the Caucasus and northern Iran, bring about the effective union of the Armenians under one state. This would lead Armenia's revolutionaries to concentrate their efforts against Russia. An alternative fear was that the tottering Ottoman Empire might become what is today known as a "failed state." The implosion of Ottoman rule would leave the region in anarchy and expose Russia's turbulent Caucasus to infiltration and raids by Armenian revolutionaries and Kurdish tribesmen. Worse still, if one of Russia's rivals—such as Germany, Britain, or even France—succeeded in gaining a foothold in eastern Anatolia, it could be expected to subvert Russian control of the Caucasus precisely by backing such infiltration and raids.[61] Establishing clients among the Kurds would not only give the Russians leverage over the

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[57] Richard Hovannisian puts the number slain in the hundreds (*Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967], 18).

[58] Anahide Ter Minassian, *Nationalism and Socialism in the Armenian Revolutionary Movement (1887–1912)* (Cambridge, MA: Zoryan Institute, 1984), 53; Hratch Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutiun 1890/1924* (Milan: Oemme edizioni, 1990), 93–95; Antranig Chalabian, *Revolutionary Figures: Mihran Damadian, Hambardzum Boyadjian, Serob Aghibur, Hrair-Dzhoghk, Gevorg Chavush, Sebastatsi Murad, Nikol Duman,* trans. Arra S. Avakian (s.l., USA: A. Chalabian, 1994), 282–83.

[59] Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 98–102.

[60] Archival records would suggest that it was the number one mission for police intelligence between 1911 and 1914, more important than tracking alleged pan-Islamist or pan-Turkist subversives. See, for example, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), Biuro zaveduiushchego zagranichnoi agenturoi Departamenta politsii v Konstantinopole, f. 529, op. 1.

[61] S. D. Sazonov, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, [1927,] 1991), 168–69; Memorandum of Sazonov, 29 February 1916 [13 March 1916], *Razdel Aziatskoi Turtsii* (Moscow: Litizdat NKID, 1924), 160–61. Cross-border raids by Kurds were a concern of tsarist authorities from at least the 1880s onward (Candan Badem, *Çarlık Rusyası Yönetiminde Kars Vilayeti* [Istanbul: Birzamanlar Yayıncılık, 2010], 77, 220).

region's dominant group, but it would also provide a local counterweight against Armenian revolutionaries.

Any plan to make use of the Kurds, however, faced a basic obstacle: the Kurds had no sense of unity or common purpose. As the Russian army's leading expert on the Kurds wrote:

> The Kurds have neither a clear national self-consciousness nor a sense of patriotism in the Kurdish-national sense, and therefore all their uprisings against Turkish domination were put down, were accompanied by fratricidal conflict, never simultaneously took place throughout all of Kurdistan, and never led to the formation of a Kurdish state.… [T]hey are all divided into tribes that fight among themselves, and therefore their relations to Turkey or the state fighting with Turkey will be determined almost exclusively by the material and personal advantages of each tribe or clan taken separately.[62]

It is worth noting how Russian officialdom conceptualized the Kurds as a people, a nation, something innately more than a collection of tribes despite their empirical observation of precisely the opposite. Scholars have called attention to the way Russia's administrators at home began to classify and conceive of the population in ethno-national terms. Unremarked is the way the national idea began to penetrate the worldview of the empire's makers of foreign policy. They began to think of the outside world, too, as one composed of distinct nations. Whereas in earlier decades the Russians concerned themselves with separate Kurdish tribes, by the beginning of the 20th century they saw the Kurds as a nation with a common destiny and identified their lack of unity as a deficiency to be overcome. By facilitating Kurdish unification, the Russians would make them a more formidable entity and make it easier to deal with them.[63] It was, after all, difficult to work with, let alone control, a coterie of tribal chiefs.

Although Abdürrezzak sought Russian support for the struggle against Ottoman rule, the more pressing concern for Russian authorities in 1910 was the pacification of the Kurdish tribes of Russian-occupied northern Iran. Between 1906 and 1912, Ottoman forces mounted occasional interventions into the disputed border district of Kotur and encouraged local Kurds to defy Russian authority.[64] One way the Russians sought to ameliorate anti-Russian sentiment among those Kurds was to back Abdürrezzak and prominent local Kurds such as the sheikh of Kotur, Ismail Agha Simko, head of the Shakak, the second largest

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[62] P. I. Aver´ianov, *Etnograficheskii i voenno-politicheskii obzor aziatskikh vladenii Ottomanskoi imperii* (St. Petersburg: Voennaia tipografiia, 1912), 15.

[63] Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 273.

[64] McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds,* 83–84.

tribal confederation in Iran.[65] While on his way to meet with Simko in March 1911, Abdürrezzak explained that he hoped to counter Istanbul's incitement of Ottoman Kurds and to restrain Iran's Kurds from looting and attacking government institutions and Christians, all the while working to build Russia's influence inside Kurdistan.[66] Thus he spent the summer of 1911 agitating among the Kurds for a unified Kurdistan under Russian protection. Noting the Kurds' potential in future conflict with the Ottomans, Abdürrezzak's stature among them, and his sympathy toward Russia, tsarist officials pegged him as a figure worth cultivation.[67] Writing in the fall of 1911, a deputy governor of Van province reported that Russian consular officials across the border in Maku, Iran, were supplying Kurds with Mauser rifles and working with Abdürrezzak, who was inciting Ottoman Kurds against the Ottoman state.[68]

Seyid Ali, Kör Hüseyin, and other tribal leaders now operating out of Iran also availed themselves of Russian good will and support to challenge Ottoman rule. Taking advantage of Italy's declaration of war upon the Ottoman Empire in 1911, they led a series of revolts in the regions of Siirt, Bitlis, and Van in 1911. They distributed leaflets declaring "This land is our land" and claiming Bitlis and the neighboring territories as Kurdish.[69]

Although widespread, the revolts of 1911 were uncoordinated and never posed a mortal challenge to Ottoman rule. Abdürrezzak recognized the need for unified action and set about bringing the Kurdish tribal leaders together. After an inconclusive meeting of such leaders in Erzurum in February 1912, he put together a more successful assembly that May in southeast Anatolia. The participants set up a body to coordinate their actions, and called it "Irshad" (correct guidance). Irshad set as its goal the liberation of Ottoman "Kurdistan" and toward that end ambitiously aimed to form an armed force of 70,000 men. The organization opened branches in Van, Diyar-ı Bekir, Urfa, and elsewhere.[70]

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[65] Martin van Bruinessen, "Kurdish Tribes and the State of Iran: The Case of Simko's Revolt," in *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, ed. Richard Tapper (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), 379.

[66] Telegram of Kokhanovskii, 8 March 1911 [22 March 1911], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3572, l. 64.

[67] Telegram of Kokhanovskii, 7 June 1911 [20 June 1911], AVPRI, f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3572, l. 75.

[68] Van Province to the Interior Ministry, 29 Eylül 1327 [12 October 1911] BOA, DH SYS D. 7 S. 2-2.

[69] Suat Akgül, "Rusya'nın Doğu Anadolu Politikası" (Ph.D. diss., Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 1995), 72; Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 201–2.

[70] Suat Akgül, "Rusya'nın Yürüttüğü Doğu Anadolu Politikası İçinde İrşad ve Cihandani Cemiyetlerinin Rolü," in *Prof. Abdurrahman Çaycı'ya Armağan,* n.e. (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi, 1995), 29.

Russian consular officials had been informed of the meeting ahead of time and were soon in direct contact with Irshad. Shortly after meeting with Russian officials in Tiflis, one of Irshad's founders, Abdusselam Barzani, was carrying out attacks along the Ottoman border with Russian weapons and money.[71] In August, another of Irshad's founders, a captain in the Ottoman Jandarma named Hayreddin Berazi, approached the Russian Consulate in Erzurum to ask for Russian assistance. Berazi had in mind more than just money and guns. Irshad was determined to rid Kurdistan of Ottoman control, but a wholly independent sovereign Kurdistan was something difficult to conceive, especially given the lack of institutional infrastructure among the Kurds. As Berazi explained to the Russians, however, Kurdistan could be joined to the Russian Empire and assume a status similar to that of the German principalities in Germany.[72] Similar schemes inspired by the examples of Khiva and Bukhara, Russian protectorates where Muslims enjoyed internal autonomy, were also circulating widely among Kurds.[73]

Giving Shape to an Unformed Nation

Events in the fall of 1912 spurred St. Petersburg to take a more aggressive interest in the Kurds. That October, the armies of Greece, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Serbia attacked the Ottomans and nearly drove them out entirely from the Balkans, the historical heart of their empire. That the Ottomans had long ceased to be a match for the great powers was well known, but now it appeared that they could not withstand even their former subjects. In eastern Anatolia, Armenians and Kurds could be seen openly rejoicing at the Ottomans' defeats.[74] The demonstration of Ottoman weakness startled observers outside as well as inside the empire. The empire's end looked imminent.

That imminence goaded Russia to act. With Britain, France, and Germany all increasingly active inside Anatolia, it was imperative for Russia to be proactive and ensure that it could influence the process of Ottoman disintegration so as to protect its southern border. St. Petersburg therefore decided in late 1912 to put the question of Armenian reform back onto the agenda of the great powers and thereby to create a framework that would offer international

[71] Akgül, "Rusya'nın Doğu Anadolu Politikası," 78.

[72] Calling card of Hayreddin Berazi, Dispatch of Chirkov to Girs, 16 August 1912 [29 August 1912], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3572, ll. 96, 99. He came to be identified closely with the Russians, and indeed other Kurds knew him as a "Russian emissary." See General Consul in Erzurum to the ambassador in Constantinople, 19 June 1914 [2 July 1914], AVPRI f. 129 (Turetskii stol), op. 502b, d. 5350, l. 8.

[73] General Consul in Baghdad to the Embassy in Constantinople, 25 June 1913 [8 July 1913], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, ll. 186–87.

[74] Olfer´ev to Girs, 18 March 1913 [31 March 1913], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, l. 68.

legitimacy for intervention in eastern Anatolia. It was a dramatic change in policy. Whereas during the massacres of 1895 Russia had remained passive, now in the name of the Armenians it insisted on reform of the Ottoman administration of the six provinces, including the appointment of foreign governors and control of the gendarmerie and police.[75] Throughout 1913, Russian and Ottoman diplomats pushed back and forth on the details of the reforms. Searching for ways to block the Russian initiative, the Germans even tried invoking the collective interests of the Kurds as a counter to Armenian claims.[76]

At the same time that it fought in diplomatic circles to exert control over the future of eastern Anatolia, Russia also took measures to bolster its influence on the ground in the region by boosting its support to the Kurdish separatist movement and working to give the movement greater unity and form. Writing to Russia's consuls on 28 November, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Dmitrievich Sazonov instructed them to seize this moment of Ottoman disarray to strengthen Russia's prestige among the Kurds and wean them from the Ottomans. Opining that "only en masse can the Kurds constitute a serious force," Sazonov ordered the consuls to study the question of how to unite the Kurds.[77] Some of Russia's Kurdish experts, however, expressed doubts about the idea of uniting the Kurds so hastily. The noted Near Eastern scholar Vladimir F. Minorskii warned that such a project for political unification was premature, since the Kurds "still lacked unifying cultural fundaments" and therefore might engage in "unruly and wild movements" similar to the 1880 uprising of Sheikh Ubeydullah. Accordingly, he urged that his government undertake deep social and cultural reforms to transform the Kurds into a more stable and reliable social element.[78]

In its efforts to promote the development of a broader Kurdish ethnic identity and extend its influence via a Kurdish enlightenment, Russia possessed an enthusiastic partner in the person of Abdürrezzak. Abdürrezzak fervently believed that by exposing young Kurds to Russian culture and language, the Kurds could raise their own standards of education, culture, and living. He eagerly "took up the role of the disseminator of civilization" among the Kurds.[79] Following the

[75] Somakian, *Empires in Conflict*, 46.

[76] B. A. Borian, *Armeniia, mezhdunarodnaia diplomatiia i SSSR* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel′stvo, 1928), 1:281; Sverbeev to Sazonov, 29 May 1913 [11 June 1913], in *Sbornik diplomaticheskikh dokumentov: Reformy v Armenii, 26 noiabria 1912 goda–10 maia 1914 goda* (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1915), 45.

[77] Sazonov to Girs, copied to consulates in Van, Urmiye, Bayezid, and Savujbulak, 15 November 1912 [28 November 1912], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3572, l. 109.

[78] Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 276.

[79] Secret Report to the First Department, 1913 [month and day not specified], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, l. 233.

crushing of Irshad, Abdürrezzak together with other former Irshad members founded the Jihandani (Upbringing) Society. Whereas Irshad's objective had been political and military coordination, this new society's goal was to foster a Kurdish collective identity through the establishment of a press, the publishing of a weekly newspaper, and the opening of schools. Russia willingly lent its cover and support to the society. When at the beginning of 1913 Abdürrezzak asked the Russian Consulate in Hoy to put the society under its protection, the Russian vice-consul Chirkov agreed even to serve as the society's chairman.[80]

Abdürrezzak's interest in education was intense. When the Ottomans sought to repair relations with him in 1912, Abdürrezzak had named the opening of schools for Kurds as one of his conditions for talks.[81] His involvement in education for Kurds was not unique. His uncle Abdurrahman had been working in Istanbul as director of the "Kurdish Constitutional School" (Kürd Meşrutiyet Mektebi). The Unionists, however, had no interest in seeing a specifically Kurdish school succeed, and saw to its eventual closure by scrutinizing it so closely that it could not operate. It was the first and last official school in the Ottoman Empire to carry the word "Kurd" in its title.[82]

Abdürrezzak preferred to cooperate with the Russians because he believed that under their rule it would be easier to carry out the cultural and educational work that he regarded as critical to the Kurds' future.[83] His vision of Kurdish–Russian cooperation, albeit grand and ambitious, was neither romantic nor fanciful. As he explained to Russian officials, "We [Kurds] believe in Russia. I will not speak about any kind of Platonic sympathies among Kurds toward Russians. That would be hypocrisy. We seek Russia's friendship and desire to grow up on its culture for practical reasons." Alongside respect for Russian culture went an appreciation for the utility of Russian might. Whereas the great powers of Europe were distant and unreliable, he continued, Russia was nearby and could wield its power to liberate the Kurds. But first, Abdürrezzak argued, the Kurds needed to establish a secure "nest":

> It will be easiest for us to do this inside Iran. This will be the first step toward the establishment of an independent Kurdish principality. If we succeed in doing this, then I will quickly raise a rebellion in Turkish Kurdistan, where, I repeat, we have everything prepared and the Kurds wait only for me to give the signal. We intend to seize only those lands that are part of

[80] Court Councillor Chirkov to the chargé d'affaires in Tehran, 14 February 1913 [27 February 1913], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, l. 23; Akgül, "Rusya'nın Yürüttüğü Doğu Anadolu Politikası," 30.

[81] Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 214.

[82] Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi*, 81–82, 91.

[83] Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya*, 37.

> Kurdistan without any intention to move into the interior of Turkey or Persia. Then the Kurds will ask the Russian emperor to take them under his patronage and secure their independence.[84]

In February 1913, Abdürrezzak asked Russian officials for assistance with opening schools. He explained that the Kurds, trapped by Turkish and Iranian rule, had been blocked from entering into contact with European civilization. Russia's cultural engagement with the Kurds would "destroy the centuries-old barrier" that had separated the Kurds from civilization. The Kurds would acquire enlightenment "from the north." Deploying the racial idiom common at the time, he emphasized that the Kurds, like the Russians but unlike the Turks, were part of the "Indo-European race" and spoke an Indo-European language with roots in Sanskrit. Further, Abdürrezzak wanted the Kurds to drop the Arabic script and adopt the Cyrillic script in its stead. His contact in Hoy, Chirkov, urged his superiors to pay close attention to the Kurdish leader and respond affirmatively to his requests.[85]

St. Petersburg did respond positively, and the Russian Consulate in Hoy began working with Abdürrezzak to start a school for Kurdish children. The scion of Bohtan threw himself into building support among local Kurds for the school, talking it up and never letting slip an "opportunity to draw the attention of his compatriots to their deep moral savagery [*glubokoe nravstvennoe odichanie*] which threatened death to their whole people and to the chance opening before them to receive salvation from Russia." His efforts were not in vain. The biggest challenge facing the school project, Chirkov wrote, was not "overcoming the great intellectual and moral backwardness of the locals" but rather protecting it from the intrigues of Iranian officials who considered the Kurds only slightly better than the Russians. Muslim religious leaders, Iranian as well as pro-Ottoman, agitated against the school, spreading rumors that its real purpose was the conversion of students to Christianity. The opposition was such that Abdürrezzak had to invite an old friend from Tiflis, a Frenchman, to serve as school director. The school itself was located in the center of Hoy in a large house with a garden that Simko had purchased at the beginning of the year with funds raised from among the Kurds. It had European-style classrooms and a dining hall for the students. Simko, who played a secondary role in the effort, had wanted to open the school on 19 October to honor the tsarevich,

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[84] Dzhalil, *Iz istorii*, 103–4.

[85] Chirkov to the imperial chargé d'affaires in Tehran, 14 February 1913 [27 February 1913] AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, ll. 23–25. Chirkov had been a consistent sympathizer of the Kurds, reminding colleagues who regarded Kurds as barbarous highlanders that "Kurds were not only bandits but also farmers, shepherds, graziers, city dwellers" (Dzhalil, *Iz istorii*, 105, 109).

but the opening had to wait until necessary school supplies arrived from Tiflis. Simko personally delivered the first group of students, 29 children between the ages of eight and ten from the surrounding areas, for the opening ceremony on 4 November. The children were dressed in European-style uniforms, and each wore a white Cossack *papakha*, or lambskin hat, on his head. An escort of 40 mounted Kurds accompanied the group of students. Russian military officers, including the local commander in chief, General Veselovskii, attended the opening ceremony, along with the region's governor and leading notables, khans, and merchants. The school's mullah commenced the ceremony with a prayer asking God to grant a long life to the tsar and to strengthen the power and greatness of the tsar's state.[86] Foreign Minister Sazonov reciprocated by instructing that his appreciation for such sympathies be relayed to the school's founders.[87]

The Russians intended that the school would create a future Kurdish elite that would be tied to Russia. Their intention dovetailed with Abdürrezzak's. In addition to the basic subjects, the students were to study not just the Russian language but also Russian literature, Russian society, Russia's borders, natural resources, governmental structure, legal system, and Russia's "wide tolerance for Muslims." Russian literature was to be translated into Kurdish, and Kurdish literature into Russian. The best students were expected to go to Russia for higher education. Yet Abdürrezzak's zeal for Russian influence extended beyond even such a Russocentric curriculum. While in St. Petersburg meeting with officials from the foreign and other ministries, he insistently requested that St. Petersburg's leading Orientalists set to work on a Cyrillic alphabet for Kurdish. When he met with Russia's leading Kurdologist, Academician Iosif Orbeli, the two read classical Kurdish poetry. Orbeli consented to take up the alphabet project.[88] Meanwhile, Chirkov readied a project to open more schools for Kurds in four nearby cities. Ottoman Turkish and Armenian newspapers reported the opening of Abdürrezzak's school, and the Ottoman and German governments each responded to the news by announcing plans to establish their own schools for Kurds.[89]

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[86] Vice-Consul in Hoy to the imperial chargé d'affaires in Tehran, 30 October 1913 [12 November 1913], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, ll. 204–9; Lazarev, 225–26.

[87] Dzhalil, *Iz istorii*, 113.

[88] K. N. Iuzbashian, *Akademik Iosif Abgarovich Orbeli (1887–1961)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1986), 35–36.

[89] Dzhalil, *Iz istorii*, 114 n. 63. The Ottomans managed to scrounge from their depleted coffers 17,500 Turkish liras to open a school for 1,000 Kurds outside of Van. They set aside another 2,500 lira to build schools in Kurdish villages. The Germans decided to start bringing an annual cohort of ten Kurdish schoolchildren to Germany for education and to open local German schools to Kurds (copy of the dispatch of the vice-consul in Hoy to the imperial chargé d'affaires in Tehran,

Like Abdürrezzak, the other leading Kurd in the project, Simko, saw much to admire in Russia. A visit to Tiflis had made a deep and positive impression upon him regarding imperial Russian culture, and Russian officials returned the respect by describing him as a man with a "sharp mind and a strong character."[90] Other assessments of Abdürrezzak and Simko, however, expressed deep skepticism regarding their true motives and characters. One such assessment belittled Abdürrezzak as obsessed with a hatred of Turks, arguing that his ambitions "owed more to a personal desire to get revenge against the Turks than to his worries for his fellow tribesmen." Out of a thirst for vengeance, he allegedly wished to divert a significant portion of the funds the Kurds had raised from the building of schools to financing guerrilla bands in the vilayets of Erzurum and Van. Simko objected to this. He argued that only a full-scale, united Kurdish uprising to take advantage of the Porte's difficulties in the Balkans and elsewhere made sense. Funds for anything less would be better spent on building schools and protecting Kurdish refugees in Iran. This disagreement cooled relations between the two.[91] Soon thereafter a destructive rivalry developed from which Abdürrezzak's prestige and authority never entirely recovered.

The assessment of Abdürrezzak as possessed by anti-Turkish vitriol was probably unfair. His animosity was real but not all-consuming. At the same time, it would also be a mistake to regard him as motivated solely by a commitment to improve the lot of the Kurds as a whole. When negotiating with the Ottoman government regarding his possible return, Abdürrezzak made special posts and jobs for his relatives one of his conditions for coming over. The grandson of an emir had not forsaken his tribal and familial allegiances for a greater, more egalitarian national allegiance. Like many other Kurds cooperating with Russia, he hoped to leverage Russian support to recover his lost patrimony. The appeal of union with the Russian Empire lay in the possibility that, due to the flexibility inherent to imperial forms of indirect rule, under Russian rule the tribal elites could regain the positions they had lost following the rise of the Unionists. Thus Russia's appeal to the Kurdish chiefs was dual—as a gateway for Kurds to European enlightenment and as a vehicle to the restoration of the elite's local supremacy.

30 October 1913 [12 November 1913], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, ll. 204–9; Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 225–26).

[90] Vice-Consul in Hoy to the imperial chargé d'affaires in Tehran, 30 October 1913 [12 November 1913] AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, l. 204.

[91] Secret report from Hoy to the First Department, 1913, AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, ll. 234–35. For more Russian evaluations of Abdürrezzak, see Dzhalil, *Iz istorii*, 97–98.

Ottoman Efforts to Counter the Kurdish Rebels

Istanbul was aware that the pacification and reform of eastern Anatolia was a long-term and multidimensional project at the heart of which must lie land reform, and in particular the return of confiscated lands to Armenians. The fact that some Kurds had invested capital in developing those lands that they had confiscated further complicated matters. Proposals to buy up the lands and then return them to the Armenians were floated, and the government allocated funds for this purpose in 1912. The state's chronic lack of money, however, compounded by the expense of the Balkan wars, compelled Istanbul actually to impose new taxes on livestock and construction. The result was another wave of disturbances throughout eastern Anatolia.[92] The enduring opposition of the Kurds further constricted the government's ability to maneuver. Russian backing encouraged that opposition. Their provision of sanctuary across the border allowed the "Russian stalking horse" Simko and other Kurds to raid Armenian villages around Van with ease.[93] As one British official wrote, "The mere possibility of this [Russian backing] certainly makes it most difficult for the Turkish Government to alienate these Kurdish chiefs by redressing the Armenian grievances about their lands."[94]

Unable to impose a solution, the Ottomans did what they could to contain disgruntled Kurds. They employed a range of tactics toward this end, from armed suppression to awarding titles and money to loyal Kurds and offering amnesties to disloyal ones through exploiting clan rifts. For example, the Unionists threw their support behind Sheikh Abdülkadir from the Shemdinan clan, rivals to the Bedirhans.[95] They made periodic efforts to woo Abdürrezzak away from the Russians with promises of a warm reception at least as late as the middle of August 1914, although some officials cautioned that the depth of his ties to Russia was so great that he could only be regarded as a permanent Russian agent.[96] Alternately,

[92] Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 203–4, 214.

[93] Morgan Philips Price, *War and Revolution in Asiatic Russia* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1918), 106.

[94] Klein, "Power in the Periphery," 322.

[95] Hakan Özoğlu, "'Nationalism' and Kurdish Notables in the Late Ottoman–Early Republican Era," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, 3 (2001): 392–93; Derk Kinnane, *The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 25; V. P. Nikitin, *Kurdy* [trans. from French] (Moscow: Progress, 1964), 290. Abdülkadir was a CUP member of long standing, having joined in 1896 (Naci Kutlay, *İttihat-Terakki ve Kürtler* [Istanbul: Fırat Yayınları 1991], 34).

[96] Interior Ministry to Van, 31 Temmuz 1330 [13 August 1914], BOA DH ŞFR D. 43 S. 245; Ambassador in St. Petersburg to the Foreign Ministry, 4 Şubat 1914 (most unusually, this document does not use either the Ottoman Hicri or Rumi calendars. Context suggests the date is according to the Gregorian calendar, 4 February 1914, but it might be according to the Julian, 17 February 1914), BOA, Bab-ı Ali Evrak Odası Nezaretler Gelen Giden (BEO GG) [Document Office of the Sublime Porte, Incoming and Outgoing Correspondence], 320372.

they attempted to eliminate Abdürrezzak and other rebel leaders by dispatching assassins and placing bounties on their heads.[97]

These efforts to maintain control, however, were more than matched by Russian efforts to undermine that control. By 1912, the Russians were funneling significant amounts of arms and money to Kurdish tribes,[98] used their consulates as safe houses to conduct meetings with Kurdish leaders,[99] infiltrated saboteurs to Kurdish regions through Georgia, and dispatched "trade missions" to make contact with Kurds.[100] Russians officers disguised as Kurds were operating inside eastern Anatolia.[101] A correspondent for the St. Petersburg newspaper *Birzhevye vedomosti* traveling in Anatolia in March 1913 gravely upset Ottoman officials by spreading rumors that the Kurds of Diyar-ı Bekir and Bitlis had formed a separatist state in the districts of Cizre and Midyat, "declared independence," and appealed to the great powers for protection.[102] Ottoman Interior Ministry officials saw Russian–Kurdish collaboration as a "great danger."[103] If Abdürrezzak and the Kurds brought Anatolia to a state of chaos, they predicted, it would be a "victory for the Russian government and a disaster for our state."[104]

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[97] Telegram of the vice-consul in Hoy, 7 November 1913 [20 November 1913], vice-consul in Hoy to the First Department, December 1913 [day not specified], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, l. 232; Vice-Consul in Urmia to Tehran, 31 May 1913 [13 June 1913], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3562, l. 160; Telegram from Orlov to Sazonov, 24 June 1914 [7 July 1914], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, l. 354; Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya*, 40–42.

[98] Somakian, *Empires in Conflict*, 52; Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 223.

[99] The Russian Kurdologist Vladimir Minorskii urged the opening of more consulates to establish contact with non-Turks ("Asian Turkey and Its Study," AVPRI f. 129, op. 502/b, d. 7600, ll. 2, 4–5). It is notable that Sazonov backed the opening of more consulates in Anatolia over the objections that the Foreign Ministry could ill afford them. See Kokovtsov to Sazonov, 1 May 1912 [14 May 1912], in *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia v epokhu imperializma (Movei)*, 19, pt. 2 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial´no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel´stvo, 1938), 493; Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 224.

[100] Grand vizier to the minister of the interior, 5 Mayıs 1329 [18 May 1913], BOA Dahiliye Nezareti Muhaberat-ı Umumiye İdaresi (DH MUİ) [Interior Ministry general correspondence] D. 23 S. 10.

[101] Van to the Interior Ministry, 5 Teşrin-i Evvel 1329 [18 October 1913], BOA DH SYS D. 23 S. 16; cipher from the Directorate of Security to the Vilayet of Van, 14 Cemaziy-ül Evvel 1332 [10 April 1914], BOA Dahiliye Nezareti Şifre Kalemi (DH ŞFR) [Interior Ministry Cipher Section] D. 40 S. 174; See also Guinness, "Impressions of Armenia and Kurdistan."

[102] Interior Ministry to the foreign minister, 28 Mart 1329 [10 April 1913], BOA DH SYS D. 118 S. 13.

[103] Interior Ministry to Van (23 Nisan 1330) [6 May 1914], BOA DH ŞFR D. 40 S. 151.

[104] Erzurum to Interior Ministry (10 Kanun-ı Evvel) 1327 [23 December 1911], BOA DH SYS D. 90 S. 1–6.

Abdürrezzak and the Armenians

As multiple observers noted, by arming and encouraging Kurdish rebels against the Ottoman state, the Russians were putting Ottoman Armenians at risk. Resentment and fear of the Armenians, after all, was one of the prime factors behind Kurdish dissatisfaction. Some Kurds and Armenians did try to bridge the divide between their peoples to form a common front against Istanbul. The need for an Armenian–Kurdish rapprochement had been a theme of Abdurrahman and Mikdat Bedirhan's *Kurdistan* newspaper.[105] Abdürrezzak was not opposed to the idea of coexistence. When Russian officials, in a gesture of encouragement for Kurdish–Armenian cooperation, introduced Abdürrezzak to Armenian representatives in St. Petersburg, Abdürrezzak pledged his commitment to Kurdish–Armenian friendship.[106] Later he would lament the breakdown in efforts to promote this amity.

His expressions of willingness to cooperate and coexist with the Armenians notwithstanding, Abdürrezzak did see the Armenians as potential rivals to the Kurds for title to eastern Anatolia. In October 1913, an Armenian newspaper published a pamphlet ascribed to Abdürrezzak titled "The Kurdish Movement." After recounting Ottoman losses in North Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, and the Gulf, the manifesto warned that the Ottoman government was abandoning to Europe the six eastern provinces so that it might hold onto Istanbul and the rest of Asia Minor. Because "[w]e Kurds, who are known to the majority of Europeans and in all enlightened circles and even in dictionaries as half savage tribes living by robberies and as shepherds, are not recognized as a nation entitled to claim the rights of civilization as the Armenians are," he warned, the six provinces would be named "Armenia" and there the Armenians would enjoy "special privileges." Although he urged his compatriots not to do "harm to any Moslem, Christian, Armenian, or Jew," he also advised that if the Kurds did not arm themselves and mobilize immediately to assert their rights, they would be disarmed, "and then how will the ignorant Kurds be able to protect their rights against the rich but immoral Armenians?" By contrast, Abdürrezzak remarked that the Assyrians "have the same habits, manners, and tribal fitness as the Kurds" and "have joined us and are our allies." Thus the Assyrians, despite being Christians and "a nation" distinct from the Kurdish one, "will never consent that privileges should be given to Armenians, and that the Kurds and Assyrians be left uncared for." Since the Ottoman government had "consented that the six Vilayets should be sacrificed to the benefit of Armenians under the

[105] Malmîsanij, *İlk Kürt Gazetesi*, 27–28.

[106] *Movei,* series 3 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial´no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel´stvo, 1933), 2:249–50.

name of the Armenian reforms," he declared, "let us by force of arms turn out all the Ottoman officials of the Vilayets, livas, cazas, nahies and form a new Government to be governed by men elected by the nation [sic]."[107]

The failure of Abdürrezzak or any other figure to achieve Armenian–Kurdish rapprochement should not surprise us.[108] The fundamental aspirations of the two peoples were too far apart to reconcile, especially under conditions of fundamental uncertainty about the future. The conflict between these groups was the prime driver of instability in the region. "The Armenian question," as one Russian consul wrote, "was always the Kurdish–Armenian [question], since the Armenians suffered and suffer precisely from the Kurds under the weakness and incapacity (intended or not intended—that is also a large question) of the Turkish authorities."[109] Russian officials made use of the duality. To European audiences, they pointed to the threat posed to Armenians by Kurds, whereas among themselves they worried more about the Armenian threat to Russia. In their execution of policy, however, they could not but help muddle these two perspectives. [110]

The Bitlis Uprising

After a year of contentious negotiations, on 8 February 1914 the Porte finally assented to a Russian-sponsored reform plan for the six provinces plus Trabzon. Although with German support Istanbul had managed to modify the original Russian proposal, it was clear that St. Petersburg had prevailed. The plan would remove the administration and policing of the provinces from the Ottomans and place it under two European governors. Many, both inside and outside the Ottoman Empire, regarded the plan as the last step before formal Russian annexation of eastern Anatolia.[111] Two British missionaries, noting Abdürrezzak's "ambition to establish himself under the aegis of the Russians, as Shah of a

[107] Foreign Office 195/2450, Monohan to His Britannic Majesty's Ambassador, Erzurum, 31 October 1913, enclosure, "A summary translation from the Armenian newspaper 'Haratch.'" As reproduced in Justin McCarthy, Esat Arslan, Cemalettin Taşkiran, and Ömer Turan, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006), 282–85. Vilayets, livas, etc. are territorial administrative units— i.e., provinces, districts, etc.

[108] Cf. Tessa Hoffman and Gerayer Koutcharian, "The History of Armenian–Kurdish Relations in the Ottoman Empire," *Armenian Review* 30, 4 (1986): 1–44.

[109] Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 245.

[110] Ibid., 243; Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 78.

[111] Secret Telegram from the Vali of Van to the Ministry of the Interior, 25 Haziran 1329 [8 July 1913], BOA DH SYS D. 23 S. 2. The German ambassador to Istanbul Wangenheim saw Russia's arming of the Kurds as part of a carefully considered plan: Hikmet Yusuf Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, vol. 2, pt. 3 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1963), 51, 98; Somakian, *Empires in Conflict*, 59–60. Russia's methods and goals in the region were sufficiently transparent that even visitors to the region understood that Russia was using the Kurds to destabilize the region and make

United Kurdistan," commented, "though a 'United Kurdistan' is a sufficiently Utopian [sic] conception, such an attempt might well begin with an Armenian massacre, and bring Russian intervention in its train."[112]

Exactly one month after the reform project was signed, a major revolt broke out in Bitlis province. The imposition of new taxes on cattle and construction following the Balkan wars had further stoked estrangement from the central government among all levels of Kurds across Anatolia.[113] By the end of 1913, petitions calling for administrative autonomy, reduction of taxes, the formation of a territorial Kurdish army, the appointment of Kurds to administrative positions, and the opening of Kurdish schools were circulating, allegedly receiving the signatures of thousands.[114] In Bitlis province, some sheikhs defied tax collectors and blasted the Unionists as godless Freemasons leading the empire to catastrophe. Their tekkes, or "dervish lodges," became key nodes proliferating the slogan of "Kurdistan for the Kurds." The arrival in Bitlis of a new governor from Istanbul intent on making these "scofflaw" sheikhs comply with the tax laws all but ensured a showdown.[115]

The confrontation came on 8 March, when nervous Ottoman gendarmes, warned of an incipient revolt code-named "Şeriflik," arrested Mullah Selim Efendi al-Hizani.[116] Just several hours later, however, a party of Kurds ambushed Mullah Selim's police escort and enabled him to escape. Thereupon the mullah declared a general uprising against the government. As word traveled, Kurdish tribesmen near and far began to arrive and assemble. Convinced that the Ottoman administration was simultaneously selling them out and impoverishing them, the Kurds were fighting back.

By 10 March, as many as 8,000 Kurds had gathered at Selim's side, and some 300 chiefs had pledged their support to him.[117] The demands of Mullah Selim and the rebels were straightforward. They wanted imposition of Islamic law, Sharia, and the removal of the Ottoman administration, which they claimed was disarming the Kurds and selling the country to foreigners,[118] and declared

intervention possible. See, for example, Noel Buxton and the Rev. Harold Buxton, *Travels and Politics in Armenia* (New York: MacMillan, 1914), 153.

112 W. A. Wigram and Edgar T. A. Wigram, *The Cradle of Mankind: Life in Eastern Kurdistan* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1914), 36.

113 Ahmad, *Kurdistan*, 64.

114 Gasratian, *Kurdskoe dvizhenie,* 67; Cherif Pacha, "Le Soulèvement des Kurdes et ses causes," as cited in Eugène Jung, *La révolte arabe* (Paris: Colbert, 1924), 184.

115 A. Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Harvil, 1948), 72.

116 Mustafa Balcıoğlu, *Teşkilat-ı Mashsusa'dan Cumhuriyete* (Ankara: Nobel Yayınları, 2001), 43.

117 Ahmad, *Kurdistan*, 66.

118 Consulate in Bitlis to Girs, 7 March 1914 [20 March 1914], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, l. 271; Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 215.

their intent to arrest and impale local officials.[119] The call for Sharia had become an increasingly common rallying cry among disgruntled Kurds following the restoration of the constitution in 1908. It reflected not so much pious reverence toward the legal requirements of Islam as anger at the recognition of equal rights for Christians who were in the ascendant economically.

As tribesmen rallied to Mullah Selim, panic seized the local Christians, Armenians and Assyrians, who constituted roughly a third of the population of Bitlis district.[120] Selim attempted to mollify their worries by instructing his followers to take only financial assistance from Armenians and writing the Armenian patriarch in Istanbul that his movement was aimed at the government and anticipated Armenian assistance.[121] Few Armenians or Assyrians, however, trusted Selim's assurances that they would not be harmed.[122] The uprising alarmed Ottoman administrators, who feared that the situation could rapidly get out of control. The governor of Van warned that if the authorities did not act quickly, "we will create a Kurdish problem."[123] Istanbul relieved Bitlis's governor and ordered reinforcements to the province.

When government forces frustrated a rebel attempt to seize the Armenian monastery Khentrkadir outside Bitlis, Selim ordered Bitlis surrounded.[124] Then on 2 April Selim's men stormed the town, taking half of it. The new governor of Bitlis rejected a Russian offer to mediate, however, and, bolstered by recently arrived reinforcements, ordered a counterattack.[125] Weakened by last-minute defections to the government by some chiefs, the rebel defense collapsed. Selim took refuge in the Russian consulate while other leaders scurried across the border to Russia. Not all made it across. The Ottomans captured and then hanged 11 of the rebels. One of those hanged, Mullah Resul, defiantly announced to his executioners: "Thank God that Muslims are hanging me. I have not seen

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119 "Kourds Threatening Bitlis," *The Orient* 5, 14 (8 April 1914).

120 Secret telegram of the ambassador in Constantinople, 21 March 1914 [3 April 1914]; cipher telegram of the chief of staff of the Caucasus Military District, 26 March 1914 [8 April 1914], AVPRI f. 151 (Politicheskii arkhiv), op. 482, d. 3312, ll. 14, 20.

121 Safrastian, *Kurds*, 73.

122 Bitlis Consulate to Gul´kevich, 12 February 1914 [25 February 1914]; dispatch of S. Tukholk, 20 March 1914 [2 April 1914], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, ll. 241, 291.

123 Cipher from Van, 6 Mart 1330 [19 March 1914], BOA Dahiliye Nezareti Kalem-i Mahsûs Müdüriyeti (DH KMS) [Directorate of the Private Secretariat of the Interior Ministry] S. 16 D. 30 F. 4.

124 Secret telegram of the ambassador in Constantinople, 2 March 1914 [15 March 1914], AVPRI f. 151, op. 482, d. 3312, l. 4; dispatch of Shirkov, 2 March 1914 [15 March 1914], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, l. 253.

125 Bayur, *Türk İnkilabı Tarihi*, 2, pt. 3:189.

Russians, but I hope that you will soon and that they will take vengeance on you for me."[126]

The Bitlis uprising failed in large measure because Mullah Selim started it prematurely by several weeks. Mullah Selim was not supposed to have led the rebellion but decided to launch it after the Ottoman gendarmerie had arrested him. As a result, Abdürrezzak and Sheikh Taha were in Russia when it erupted and were unable to do much apart from scrambling to send notes promising support and arms.[127] The intended leader had been a relative of Abdürrezzak's, Yusuf Kâmil Bedirhan Pashazade. Unlike those rebels who fled north to Russia, Yusuf Kâmil fled south, making use of his contacts in the Russian consulates in Aleppo and Beirut. Speaking to those consuls, he expressed regret to the Russians for Selim's precipitate behavior, asserting that if the revolt had occurred on 28 April as originally planned, the provinces of Mosul, Van, and Diyar-ı Bekir would already have broken away from the Ottomans. He bitterly denounced the Armenians for their "two-facedness" and their alleged habit of taking the side of the Ottoman state at the critical moment as, he asserted, they did most recently in Bitlis.[128] From Beirut Yusuf Kâmil set sail via Istanbul to Odessa, and from there was brought to Tiflis, where the Russians told him to "sit quietly" for the time being.[129] He would not have to wait long.

Meanwhile, Mullah Selim and the three other Kurds remained inside the Russian Consulate in Bitlis. Initially, the Russian ambassador in Istanbul had ordered the consulate to get the Kurds to leave, explaining, "We cannot indulge banditry."[130] But when the consulate replied that expelling the Kurds would lead to their immediate capture and likely death, the ambassador relented. He then rejected the repeated appeals of the Ottoman grand vizier to hand over the insurgents with the argument that the rebellion had constituted a political,

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[126] Dispatch of Shirkov, 24 March 1914 [6 April 1914], AVPRI f. 180, d. 1406, ll. 5, 7. Five aghas and sheikhs got off relatively easy and were exiled to Medina (BOA DH SYS D.42 S. 102, 9 Haziran 1330 [22 June 1914], Interior Ministry to the Commandant of Medina).

[127] Abdürrezzak was in St. Petersburg when the revolt erupted (secret telegram from the foreign minister to the ambassador in Constantinople, 4 March 1914 [17 March 1914], AVPRI f. 151, op. 462, d. 3312, l. 8). He sent to Selim a letter promising Russian support (Akgül, "Rusya'nın Doğu Anadolu Politikası," 106).

[128] Secret dispatch from the general consul in Syria to M. N. Girs, 6 June 1914 [19 June 1914], AVPRI f. 180, op. 517/2, d. 3573, ll. 346–47.

[129] Report of Prince Shakhovskoi, 31 January 1917 [13 February 1917], Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv (RGVIA) f. 2168, op. 1, d. 264, l. 4.

[130] Secret telegram from the ambassador in Constantinople, 22 March 1914 [4 April 1914], AVPRI f. 151, op. 482, d. 3312, l.17.

not a criminal, act.[131] The Ottomans pointed out Selim's involvement in not just rebellion against the government but acts of murder and banditry against the Armenians, but to no avail.[132] The consulate harbored Mullah Selim and his compatriots until the formal declaration of war between the Russian and Ottoman empires in November. The Kurds were executed shortly after they were handed over.

The precise degree to which Russia played a role in the Bitlis revolt is not clear. The consular reports of Yusuf Kâmil's conversations indicate that Russians had some foreknowledge of the revolt and had assisted in the planning. Ottoman, German, and British observers all suspected that the revolt was part of a general plan to provoke disturbances that would permit Russia to intervene in the name of protecting Armenians. Yet when the revolt did occur, it confused Foreign Minister Sazonov, who suggested using Abdürrezzak to influence the Kurds in Bitlis,[133] and the ambassador's initial disinclination to grant refuge to Mullah Selim would be more consistent with a lack of involvement. There can be no doubt, however, that at a minimum Russia's courtship of the Kurds contributed substantially to the revolt by creating a favorable environment for it.[134] Russian assistance in organizing the so-called "Kurdish movement" and propagating its ideas and, not least, St. Petersburg's threats of a Russian occupation of eastern Anatolia had encouraged the Kurds' defiance of Istanbul.

On 4 April, the leading Unionists met to review their Kurdish policies and decided to devote greater effort to winning over Kurds through subsidies, making select Kurdish leaders senators, and prevailing upon Istanbul's Kurds to use their influence over their brethren in Anatolia. Overall, they resolved to relax their efforts at centralization. The members were relieved that the insurrection had been directed at the government and not at the Armenians, since otherwise relations with the great powers would have suffered. Thus, in addition to granting the local governors wider latitude to declare martial law and request military reinforcements, Minister of the Interior Talât Pasha ordered that special attention be paid to protecting Christians from future attacks.[135] Governing circles retained strong suspicions of Abdürrezzak's and Simko's involvement in the Bitlis events, and Talât complained repeatedly to Ambassador Nikolai Girs

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131 Secret telegram of the ambassador in Constantinople, 24 March 1914 [6 April 1914], AVPRI f. 151, op. 482, d. 3312, l. 19.

132 Talât to Bitlis province, 3 Nisan 1330 (16 April 1914), BOA DH ŞFR 40 18.

133 Sazonov to Girs, 4 March 1914 [17 March 1914], *Movei*, series 3, 2:29–30.

134 Girs himself acknowledged the key role Russian consuls played in facilitating the rebellion (Girs to Sazonov, *Movei,* series 3, 2:297).

135 Dispatch of the ambassador in Constantinople, 31 March 1914 [13 April 1914], AVPRI f. 151, op. 482, d. 3312, ll. 25–26.

about the two Kurds' intrigues.[136] The Russians retained Abdürrezzak on salary but now ordered him to keep a low profile and not undertake any actions against the Ottomans.[137]

World War I

Eastern Anatolia after the Bitlis rebellion nonetheless continued to simmer. The outbreak of war in Europe that August and the possibility of a war between the Ottomans and Russians sent tensions on both sides of the border soaring in the late summer and fall. Ottoman and Russian officials alike eyed nervously the activities of population groups on their own and the other side of the border. The tribes, unofficial but mobile martial entities, were well suited to conducting reconnaissance and carrying out raids, which they did that fall with increasing frequency and intensity, ostensibly for both empires but often for themselves.[138] Seeking to mobilize and unify the Kurds on their side, the Russians in early October gave Abdürrezzak the title "Sultan of the Tribes" (*Sultan ul-aşair*).[139]

At the end of October, naval vessels under the Ottoman flag without warning attacked Russian targets in the Black Sea, a clear act of war. The Ottoman decision to enter the war surprised Abdürrezzak. He found himself leading Kurdish forces on the Russian side at the request of Russian General Nikolaev, who supplied him with both weapons and money. His efforts met with initial success. When Abdürrezzak and his men entered the town of Ebaxe, the local Kurds greeted them warmly. Some Kurds, such as those from the Gravlar tribe, explained that whereas they would not take orders from "those who carry the Cross," they were willing to follow Abdürrezzak. In a manifesto that he wrote to the Kurds, Abdürrezzak called on them to support the Russians who would drive out from Kurdistan the "Rumi," or "Romans," a term Kurds used derisively to refer to the Ottoman Turkish successors to the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire.[140]

During the opening months of the war, Abdürrezzak continued to see support from Russian consular officials, and Russian generals requested meetings with him to plan how to best exploit his forces in battle. Abdürrezzak's unit

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136 Girs to Sazonov, 31 March 1914 [13 April 1914], *Movei*, series 3, 2:299.

137 Klemm to Orlov, 29 April 1914 [12 May 1914], *Movei*, series 3, 2:530.

138 Vladimir Genis, *Vitse-konsul Vvedenskii: sluzhba v Persii i Bukharskom khanstve, 1906–1920* (Moscow: Sotsial´no-politicheskaia mysl´, 2003), 22–34; cipher telegram from the Ninth Army, 3 Ağustos 1330 [16 August 1914], Askerî Tarih ve Stratejik Etüdleri Başkanlığı, Birinci Dünya Harbi Koleksiyonu, Klasör 2818, Dosya 59 Fihrist 2.

139 Cipher telegram from the General Security Directorate to Van Vilayet, 25 Eylül 1330 [8 October 1914], BOA DH ŞFR D. 45 S. 215.

140 Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya*, 46.

rendered substantial service to the forces of General Chernozubov.[141] Yet despite Abdürrezzak's personal goodwill toward Russia and its reciprocation by a few senior Russian officers, relations in wartime soon grew testy. The Cossacks tended to regard Kurds with hostility. At one point, a Cossack unit insisted on disarming Abdürrezzak's men until a general intervened and returned the arms. Language was a constant source of difficulty, and Abdürrezzak regretted that Georgians had not been employed as translators, as they tended to get along very well with the Kurds and among them were some excellent Turkish speakers.[142]

The greatest source of tension, however, lay in relations with the Armenians. Although Abdürrezzak still espoused his belief in cooperation, helped save Armenians fleeing massacres in 1915 in several instances,[143] and advised the Kurds that they had nothing to fear from either the Russians or the Armenians who fought alongside the Russians, events soon proved his optimism misplaced. The reaction of the Armenian volunteers to the Kurds they encountered ranged from rejection of offerings of bread and salt through slaughter of Kurdish livestock, to massacre and rape of Kurds themselves. Such attitudes were not, of course, unilateral. Even Kurds in Russian service sometimes struck at Armenians, looting and killing, to say nothing of Kurdish participation in the Ottoman massacres and death marches that resulted in the mass destruction of the Armenian community of eastern Anatolia.[144]

The outbreak of clashes between pro-Russian Armenians and pro-Russian Kurds should not surprise us. A more general rivalry between the groups was rooted in a dispute over the control of indivisible territory and resources and was already intense before the war. The adoption of the national idea as a preferred framework for state legitimacy, however, converted ethnicity into a marker of territorial sovereignty. Ethnic identity thereby became an irreducible source of tension between differing ethnic groups, regardless of the wishes or even behavior of their members. Thus, although Abdürrezzak and others managed at times to secure pledges from local Ottoman Armenians and Kurds to cooperate and coexist, the arrival of Armenian units from Russia, who identified Kurds and Muslims more generally as enemies, tended to spark confrontation and often led to atrocities.[145]

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141 Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros*, 323.

142 Bedirhan, *Otobiyografya*, 56.

143 Dzhalil, *Iz istorii*, 119.

144 McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds,* 103–6.

145 Ahmad, *Kurdistan*, 93, 99, 136, 170.

With Kurdish and Armenian hostility spiraling out of control, the Russian army attempted to divest itself of the problem entirely. In May 1915, Abdürrezzak was accused of betraying the Russian army, arrested, and sent to Julfa. Several days later he was released, but the Russians in the meantime disbanded his unit.[146] General Nikolaev informed Abdürrezzak that the Russian army no longer had room for his Kurds. Not long thereafter the Russians dissolved its Armenian volunteer regiments. Although some scholars charge that Russian intentions to deny Armenian claims to sovereignty in eastern Anatolia motivated the disbandment,[147] the volunteer regiments' predilection for preying upon Kurds exasperated Russian officers who had no interest in creating unnecessary enemies out of potential allies. Despite these efforts by Russian authorities to disentangle themselves from Kurdish–Armenian strife, the rivalry eventually took root inside Russian institutions. By 1917, pro-Kurdish and pro-Armenian Russian officials were engaged in mutual recrimination, openly trading false accusations of supporting anti-Russian Kurdish or Armenian organizations.[148]

In 1917, Russian authorities appointed Abdürrezzak and Kamil Bedirhan governors of Bitlis and Erzurum, respectively.[149] The two Bedirhans did not hold these positions for long, however. Following the fall of the tsar in March 1917, the Russian Caucasus Army disintegrated as Russian soldiers abandoned their units and headed for home. By the fall of 1917 the Caucasus Army had effectively ceased to exist, and that winter the Ottoman army would recover Eastern Anatolia and then begin an offensive into the Caucasus. Abdürrezzak withdrew with the remnants of the Russian forces. In the summer of 1918, the Ottomans finally caught up with him in Georgia, where they executed him.

Legacies

The vision of shepherding the Kurds toward the future through Russian culture had not been Abdürrezzak's alone. Writing in February 1917, the Russian Orientalist Vladimir Gordlevskii asserted:

> Before Russia stands a great cultural mission: it is already now necessary to win the sympathy of the Kurdish people, to be concerned now with raising the well-being of the Kurds so that after the war the Kurd can consciously decide the question of where he should live—here [Russian-occupied

146 Lazarev, *Kurdskii vopros,* 324.

147 Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Allies and Armenia, 1915–1918," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3, 1 (1968): 163; Somakian, *Empires in Conflict,* 109.

148 Reynolds, *Shattering Empires*, 161–63.

149 Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement*, 128.

> Anatolia], or leave for Turkey. Let the Kurd be given the opportunity to be persuaded of the superiority of Russian culture over Turkish, and let the cultural mission of Russia in the East be expanded.[150]

The collapse of imperial Russia, however, meant the collapse not only of Abdürrezzak's dream of a Kurdish entity under Russian suzerainty but also of his vision of shaping Kurdish society through Russian culture. Although the Cyrillic alphabet that he midwifed served as the basis for an experiment with a Latin alphabet for Kurdish that was pursued in Bitlis in 1919–20, the victory of Mustafa Kemal in the struggle for Anatolia put an end to such experiments in Kurdism.[151]

Although Mustafa Kemal's "national forces" initially had represented less an ethno-national movement than a cross-ethnic movement of Muslims, including Kurds, opposed to outside rule and partition of Anatolia, the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 heralded the triumph of Turkish nationalism. Kurdish students in the 1920s would receive a new phonetic alphabet and European-style schools, but the language of instruction would be Turkish and Turkish alone. Yet, as Abdürrezzak had predicted, Russia's proximity guaranteed that it would continue to exert influence over the future of the Kurds. With the rejuvenation of Russian power under the Bolsheviks in the 1920s, the Soviet Union took up sponsorship of Turkish and Iranian Kurdish organizations in the 1920s. In the 1940s, almost as if enacting Abdürrezzak's plan to start with a Kurdish mini-state inside Iran, Kurds under Soviet tutelage formed the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad.[152] Although the Mahabad Republic expired in the aftermath of the U.S.–Soviet crisis over Iran in 1946, the emergence in subsequent decades of so-called popular movements of liberation throughout the non-Western world aligned to the Soviet Union and its model of development suggests that the Kurdish patriot and Russophile Abdürrezzak Bedirhan perhaps should be seen not merely as a quixotic figure from the terminal age of empire

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[150] Gordlevskii, "U Sipandagskikh kurdov: Iz poezdki na kavkazskii front," *Musul´manskii mir* 1, 1 (1917): 34; Dzhalil, *Iz istorii*, 106.

[151] On the alphabet, see Dzhalil, *Iz istorii*, 110.

[152] On the Kurdish Republic, see McDowall, *Modern History of the Kurds,* 231–48; William Eagleton, *The Kurdish Republic of 1946* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963); and Farideh Koohi-Kamali, "The Kurdish Republic in Mahabad: Formation of a National Movement," in *The Evolution of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. Mohammed M. A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2007). On the Iranian crisis more generally, see Jamil Hasanli, *At the Dawn of the Cold War: The Soviet–American Crisis over Iranian Azerbaijan, 1941–1946* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); and Louise L'Estrange Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

but instead perhaps as a prototype of a new kind of actor in the global politics of the later 20th century.

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